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THE HELVETIAN CAMPAIGN

PART II

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IV. DID THE GAULS CALL IN THE SWISS AS ALLIES?

Ferrero believes that Caesar's military and political ambition led him to ignore even what little he may have known concerning inter-tribal relations in Gaul. In particular he builds up a story to the effect that the Gauls had invited the Helvetians to come over and help them against Ariovistus, that in attacking them Caesar made all Celtic (middle) Gaul his enemies, and that the proper policy would have been an alliance of Rome, Gaul, and Helvetia against Germany. From the standpoint of this position Caesar was so wilful in his ambitions that he overlooked this alliance between the Haeduan and the Helvetians, and wanted a fight, at any cost. Now if Caesar went to Gaul without a definite policy, as Ferrero asserts,¹ he must not be charged with the definite policy of militarism. But overlooking this inconsistency, we may now inquire what evidence there is that Caesar attacked the Helvetians out of lust for glory rather than out of a sound judgment.

In the first place, it does not seem that a consul planning a conquest of Gaul would have moved heaven and earth during his term of office to pass the *Lex Julia Repetundarum*, as Caesar did in 59. This law made it illegal for a governor to pass beyond his province, to lead an army out of his province, to wage war on his own initiative, or to approach a kingdom without orders from the Roman people or senate.² But these are the very provisions a scheming and recklessly ambitious man would have striven to keep from the statute books.

¹ Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

² Cicero, *In Pisonem* 50: "Exire ex provincia, educere exercitum, bellum sua sponte gerere, in regnum iniussu populi Romani aut senatus accedere—quae. . . . Julia de pecuniis repetundis planissime vetat."

In the second place, if Caesar had gone north with a war-at-any-cost spirit, he would have taken his reinforcements with him, instead of leaving Geneva at a critical moment to fetch new legions from Cisalpine Gaul and the Po Valley.¹

Then, too, I cannot but observe that no critic nearer to Caesar's own day than Ferrero was so keen as to detect this blunder of ambition. Many there are who call Caesar ambitious, but not one who reveals a word of disapproval with reference to this Helvetian campaign. Cassius Dio, though not hesitating to differ from Caesar in many details, yet agrees with the *Commentaries* in all essentials, and has not a word of criticism.² Plutarch likewise, though differing in details, shows great enthusiasm over the wonderful nature of Caesar's accomplishments in this campaign.³ Appian, moreover, is all admiration.⁴ Of Suetonius, Sihler says:⁵ "While Suetonius has read the writings of Caesar's admirers . . . he is evidently swayed, and indeed, very strongly swayed by political and historical writers of the opposite party. . . . The summaries of the Gallic War, e.g., were conceived in an odious and belittling spirit."⁶ Yet the admiration of Suetonius for Caesar is quite manifest (chaps. 24 and 25), and it is to be especially noted that his charge of ambitious militarism refers distinctly to his deeds after the conference at Lucca (56 B.C.) and not to the Helvetian campaign.

The idea of opposing the Helvetians in fact was so far from needing defense in the minds of the Romans that Cicero mentions such a policy as already adopted in his letter to Atticus above quoted.⁷ Moreover, he feels free in his *De provinciis consularibus* to censure Pomptinus for not continuing the conquest begun by the pacification of the Allobroges, and contrasts this policy with Caesar's more vigorous actions, referring to the Helvetian campaign

¹ *B.G.* i. 10.

⁴ Appian *Celtica* 2.

² Dio *Rome* xxxviii. 31-50.

⁵ Sihler, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

³ *Gaius Caesar*, chaps. 15-18.

⁶ It may also be noted that of Tanusius, upon whom Suetonius so largely relies (see, e.g., chap. 9), Seneca quite incidentally wrote (*Epistles* 93. 11): "Annales Tanusii scis quam ponderose sunt et quid vocentur," and compares them to people who seek long life, however inefficient it may be.

⁷ *Ad Att.* i. 19; see p. 249 of *Classical Journal* (March 1914).

as "most felicitous."¹ The writer does not forget Cicero's pro-Caesar leanings at the time of this speech. But such statements would have scarcely been made in the senate even by a prejudiced speaker, if they had not been in accord with the feeling of the majority of that body.

Finally, the attitude of Caesar's contemporaries is manifested by the seal of approval given by the senate. "So great," says Suetonius,² "had been the success of his enterprises that he had the honor of obtaining more days of thanksgiving, and those more frequently, than had ever before been decreed to any commander." The same statement is made before the senate by Cicero in the speech just quoted.³

Surely Fowler is right when he says:⁴ "Whatever question may arise later on as to the political morality of Caesar's dealings in Gaul, no reasonable man will deny that in this year, 58 B.C., his activity was justified and necessary."

But, contemporary opinion aside, what evidence is there to support this decision of Fowler's? The only possible testimony to such an alliance between the Haeduans and the Helvetians, as Ferrero presupposes, is the fact that Caesar's grain supply was temporarily delayed among the Haeduans and that Dumnorix played traitor to Caesar by leading the cavalry out of battle.⁵ But that this was the work of a small minority is certain, else Caesar would have found himself utterly cut off from the province, and would have found no Liscus to explain the situation. Now Liscus, who revealed to Caesar the treachery of Dumnorix,⁶ was *vergobret*, the supreme magistrate of his people, an elective officer, and he therefore represented the attitude of the majority. The only attempt on the part of the Helvetians to make an alliance with Gaul was the effort

¹ Cicero *De provinciis consularibus* xiii. 32: "G. Pomptinus fortissimus vir, ortum repente bellum Allobrogum atque hac scelerata coniuratione excitatum proeliis fregit, eosque domuit, qui lacessierant, et ea victoria contentus, re publica metu liberata, quievit. Caesaris longe aliam video fuisse rationem. Non enim sibi solum cum eis quos iam armatos contra Populam Romanum videbat bellandum esse duxit sed totam Galliam in nostram dictionem esse redigendam."

² Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 24.

⁴ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

³ Cicero *De prov. cons.* x. 25.

⁵ *B.G.* i. 16-18.

⁶ *B.G.* i. 16 and Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 505.

of Orgetorix which was immediately repudiated by his people. On the other hand, we know that the anti-Roman feeling in Gaul was so slight that Caesar was able to keep a large number of Gallic chiefs under his eye in his own camp.¹ Had there been any general disaffection, such surveillance over their leaders would have been resented. Just what the nature of the "anti-Roman party" was, it is difficult to say. All agree that no little opposition to Rome was rife in Gaul. Probably, however, this was not at all organized. Certainly we are not sure that it was. Had it been in any sense a national movement, Diviciacus, as a Druid, would have stood behind it. When we realize that it took a Vercingetorix later, we begin to see the incredibility of a national movement so early. The Sequani, moreover, among whom the anti-Roman feeling is thought to have been particularly strong, were no less friendly to Caesar than the Haeduan themselves; for it is to be remembered that the Helvetians could not persuade them to permit their passage, but had to call upon Dumnorix to urge the matter for them.² This shows positively that there was no agreement between the Helvetians and the Gauls as a whole. Indeed, Dio Cassius tells us that, "not abiding by their covenant, however, they [the Helvetians] plundered the Aeduan's country. Then the Sequani and Aedui sent to Caesar to ask assistance, and begged him not to let them perish."³ This does not look much like an alliance between the Gauls and the Helvetians. How strange that the Gauls would force their so-called allies to resort to plundering rather than to feed them! Still another proof lies in the fact that Caesar could fall back on Bibracte, the Haeduan capital, for supplies.⁴ This fact

¹ *B.G.* i. 16. 11: ". . . principibus, quorum magnam copiam in castris habebat."

² *B.G.* i. 9: "His cum sua sponte persuadere non possent, legatos ad Dumnorigem Haeduum mittunt, ut eo deprecatore a Sequanis impetrarent. Dumnorix gratia et largitione apud Sequanos plurimum poterat et Helvetiis erat amicus, quod ex ea civitate Orgetorigis filiam in matrimonium duxerat. . . . Itaque rem suscipit et a Sequanis impetrat ut per fines suos Helvetios ire patiantur."

Ferrero's absolutely lawless method of argumentation is well illustrated at this point. Utterly ignoring this passage, and offering positively no trace of authority from any other source in opposition to it, he boldly and carelessly asserts (p. 4): "They sent to the Sequani to ask permission . . . which was readily granted them."

³ *Dio Rome* xxxviii. 32.

⁴ *B.G.* i. 23: "Rei frumentariae prospiciendum existimavit; iter ab Helvetis avertit ac Bibracte ire contendit."

alone utterly refutes Ferrero's assertion that "it was Dumnorix who through his wealth and popularity controlled the policy of the Aeduan senate."¹ Again, had Gaul and the Helvetians been in league, it would have been impossible after the battle of Bibracte for Caesar to induce the Lingones² to refuse the Swiss protection, or to have the Gauls pursue and return to him the six thousand Verbigini who fled after the surrender.³

To sum this matter up, we may say that if Ferrero's guess, that the Helvetians were the invited allies of the Gauls, were true, they would have gone at once through the Sequanian territory without parleying with Caesar, they would have done no plundering, no deputies would have been sent to Caesar for aid, no Gallic chieftains would have stayed in his camp, his army would have met open resistance from all the tribes, or else, if led on as far as Bibracte, would have been entrapped and slaughtered, no provisions could have been obtained, no one would have explained the treachery of Dumnorix, and above all, the Helvetians would have been protected by the allies.

The Helvetians, moreover, manifested no intention of fighting against Ariovistus, as Ferrero supposes they were summoned by the Haeduans to do. Every fact known to us goes to show that they were simply on a trek or migration in search of fertile and liberal territories where there would not be the ever more serious conflicts with the Germans. Caesar may or may not have been right in his judgment of where they first intended to go. That is not at all essential. They may not have been sure themselves. But he could not have been far wrong. Divico, their leader, was familiar with Aquitania, as he had led the old excursion thither in company with the Cimbri and Teutones.⁴ Cicero's letter (*Ad Att.* i. 19: "The Helvetians are in arms and are making raids upon the province") shows that the reconnoitering had been toward the southwest. Cassius Dio explicitly states⁵ that their intention was "to cross the Rhone and settle somewhere near the Alps." In fact they did actually start, not toward the Germans, but directly away

¹ Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

² *B.G.* i. 26. 7.

³ *B.G.* i. 27. 4; 28. 1.

⁴ *B.G.* i. 13. 2.

⁵ Dio *Rome* xxxviii. 31.

from them. Caesar says: "The Helvetians by joining boats and making many rafts, and others by fords of the Rhone . . . attempted to break through; but repulsed by the strength of the fortification and by the charge and weapons of the soldiers, desisted."¹ Plutarch, too, supports Dio and Caesar at this point, saying² that the Helvetians "were advancing through that part of Gaul which was included in the Roman province, just as the Cimbri and Teutones had done before." It does not do for Ferrero here³ bluntly to assert, "The Helvetians made no attempt to invade the province"; for thereby he not only sets aside all primary sources, but fails to explain the long delay at the start. If they wanted to go north to help the other Gauls fight Ariovistus, why did they not go? Why wait for Caesar's permission to go south? It is also to be observed that they had no quarrel with Ariovistus. Their strife had been with the German tribes neighboring to their own lands.⁴ If they had wished revenge, they would have turned east to find the enemy. If they had desired relief, they would go anywhere except against the militant hosts of Ariovistus. If they had been willing to serve Gaul, they could not have done better than to stay at home and act as a bulwark on an oft-attacked frontier.⁵ And last of all, we may observe that, although it was not unusual for whole tribes to wander about in search of new homes with all their women, children, and possessions, yet it was scarcely the custom to set out on a definite military campaign against a definite enemy of overwhelming numbers, with an army three-fourths of which were non-combatants.

V. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN CAESAR AND THE HELVETIANS

We have now shown that Caesar was familiar with the circumstances which he faced, that the situation of Gallic politics did not

¹ *B.G.* i. 8. 4.

² Plutarch *Gaius Caesar*, chap. 18: 'Ελβεττίους . . . οἱ . . . ἐχώρουν πρόσω διὰ τῆς ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους Γαλατίας, ὥσπερ πάλαι κίμβροι καὶ τεύτονες.

³ Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 4 and note.

⁴ This they were abundantly able to do, and Caesar explicitly states that they often carried the war even into German territory: "aut ipsi in eorum finibus bellum gerunt." May it not be that Ariovistus crossed farther north precisely because of the Helvetian opposition at the Alps?

⁵ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

require peace between Rome and the Helvetians, and now we conclude our study by stating why it was impossible for Caesar, even though he had desired, and even though the Helvetians had been the allies of the Haeduans, to make the alliance with the Swiss which Ferrero insists would have been the proper policy.

In the first place, Rome had learned the dangerous character of such migrations as the Helvetians were undertaking. Whether they were headed for the territories of the Santones was not important. Caesar well knew that Gaul was already well occupied,¹ without any more westward trekking. Even if they came most peacefully, they must by necessity drive from their abodes some who already lived wherever they wished to settle, just as the westward-pushing Germans had disturbed them. Sooner or later the impact would be felt on the boundaries of the province.

An alliance with the Swiss was also undesirable because by their very movement they had shown their unwillingness to do what Rome would first have sought from them as allies. To plug the hole through which the Germans were sure to come was the proper function of the Helvetians. If they would not do this, Rome had no use for them. It is notable that this is precisely the thing that Caesar required of them after his victory.

Finally, the very attitude of the Helvetians made it impossible for Caesar to do what Ferrero thinks he should have done. They were plainly not on a military excursion or in readiness for military alliance with anybody. With all their carts and food and women and children and fodder and baggage, they clearly showed that their one intention was to seek new abodes. Their spirit, moreover, was haughty and hostile—not one to be treated with, even had other conditions made it advisable. Cicero had told Atticus in 60 that the Helvetians were raiding the province. These people had been in the eyes of Romans enemies of long standing. It was a tribe of the Helvetians who had joined the Cimbri and Teutones on their invasions, and fifty years before had slain Caius Cassius, the consul, and Lucius Piso, his lieutenant, and had sent their army under the yoke.²

¹ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

² *B.G.* i. 7, 4 and i. 12, 6 and 8.

Then when Nammeius and Verucloetius came to Caesar,¹ they had orders to state—not a request—but an intention: “legatos ad eum mittunt *qui dicerent sibi esse in animo sine ullo maleficio iter per provinciam facere.*” Then, on being refused permission, the Helvetians tried to cross the Rhone without it.² This is just in harmony with their language. This attempt to force a passage made an alliance still more impossible.

Even after the destruction of the Tigurini they were not humbled. But Divico, the old war-horse, came to Caesar all in a passion, unable to complete his first sentence without a threat;³ and when Caesar made his careful, firm reply, at the close of which he stated that under the circumstances hostages would be necessary, Divico broke off negotiations in a rage, with that noble, but wholly unconciliatory speech: “Ita Helvetios a maioribus suis institutos esse ut obsides accipere, non dare consuerint; eius rei populum Romanum esse testem.”⁴ Then at once: “Hoc responso dato, discessit”! Surely, even though Gallic politics and Roman policy had required an alliance with the Helvetians (as we have shown was not the case), Caesar could not be blamed for failing to come to terms with so intractable a people. Finally, let it be noted that if in this account Caesar had been trying to cover up a mistake, he could have made himself out to be a second Marius by declaring the Helvetians were making, not a simple trek, as he does, but an armed invasion, as the Cimbri and Teutones had before. Because he offers the simple explanation we may be sure he was writing, not for his own glory, but to tell the truth.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have tried in this study to show both the general honesty of Caesar's record and the wisdom of his work against the Helvetians. He went to his province well informed of the situation, he found no such alliance between Gaul and Helvetia as Ferrero imagines there was, and he treated the Helvetians in the only way a virile governor of the province could have treated a people with their history, their

¹ *B.G.* i. 7.

³ *B.G.* i. 13.

² *B.G.* i. 8. 4.

⁴ *B.G.* i. 14.

purpose, and their attitude. But after all is said, Caesar's greatest justification for all his work lies in his success. If he had failed, we should call him rash, ambitious, wilful. But he succeeded. He was a child of destiny. Beginning in the dark, he boldly groped his way by patriotic and ambitious deeds to an eminence from which he could look back and see his path illumined by the light of fate. As men now look upon it they think he had the path planned from the first for his personal glory, and they frame all manner of schemes and put them in the mind of the conqueror. His success would justify almost any ambition, were personal ambition the keynote of his achievement. But surely in the case of this Helvetian campaign, the cogitations of modern historians furnish the only evidence we have that Caesar's exploits were not the deeds of a wise and patriotic Roman.